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ABSTRACT

The author of this brief examination of student participation in school policy formation recommends that schools committed to increasing student participation provide opportunities for students to work collaboratively with teachers and administrators in decision making groups, for students to influence decision making from groups solely of their own membership, and for considerable student initiative in designing individual academic programs. In addition to presenting models for participation, the author discusses the decision making environment, including legal and political considerations and the changing educational patterns brought about by the emergence of educational alternatives. Accountability, effective communication, dissemination and confidentiality of information, and the precise specification of authority are necessary for effective implementation of student participation. (Author/DS)

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Models for Student Participation

Gil Schmerler

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Office of Student Activities
National Association of Secondary School Principals

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chapter 1

Do We Really Mean It?

Can there really be a need—in the late 1970s—to justify student involvement in our secondary schools? Surely everyone is for it.

The Council of State School Officers, for example, "endorses the concept of student involvement in planning, developing, and evaluating the educational programs that directly affect them."[1] The National Association of Secondary School Principals, in *The Reasonable Exercise of Authority,* encouraged its members to ensure "student participation—to the maximum extent feasible—in the development of rules of conduct and of related disciplinary procedures." The National Education Association, through its Task Force on Student Involvement, said, "Because institutions exist to serve students, clearly defined means must be provided for student participation in the formulation and implementation of the institution's policies."

There can sometimes be a significant gap, however, between theory and practice. In one large city, for example, a plan to involve students in the selection of administrative personnel was called by the president of the administrator's association "utterly silly . . . . What does the average kid of 15 know about picking principals?"

When the school board of another city voted to add two secondary students as "associate" members, a city councilman asked the city solicitor to enjoin the board from adding the students to its ranks. The solicitor ruled that the board could have the student commissioners as long as the students had no legal status. His ruling held that "it is manifest that the proposed student commissioners will not be members of the board, will not vote as members of the board or any of its committees, will not have any power or authority with regard to the administration of the school system, and will have no prerogatives other than those which are accorded to any member of the general public."

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1. *State and Federal Relations in Education* (Washington, D.C., The Council of Chief State School Officers, 1971), p. 69.

And when there is failure, it is the students who are blamed. "Students just can't sustain interest in the day-to-day tedium of institutional governance," critics have said. "Students don't understand the realities of decision making—the powerlessness of most of us, and the need for compromise," goes another refrain.

The question then is, "when do we begin to teach them?"

Student participation will involve risks and occasionally major risk. Educators must be prepared for some inefficiency, some frustration at the occasionally immature wrangling that will accompany student participation, and, occasionally, some bad decisions. Especially at the beginning of the process, when students are untrained, there will be problems. Educators who make a commitment to student participation must also make a commitment to weather the difficulties. There lies problem: In many cases, the commitment has been only skin deep. The belief that student participation is an essential component of good education has too often been lacking, and it is necessary to restate the case for student participation—albeit simply—before going on to show how it can be, and has been, done.

- *The moral reason.* Citizens have a right to some say in the major decisions that govern their lives; students are citizens, and schools dominate a large part of their lives.

- *The morale reason.* Where students feel that they do have some influence over their environment and that their opinions are respected, the result is an atmosphere of greater trust, civility, and mutual respect.

- *The decisional reason.* Students frequently have valuable input not available to administrators and teachers unless students are part of the decision-making process.

- *The educational reason.* If one of the major goals of the school is to produce good citizens, there is no better way than to give students strong practical experience in the art of government. Further, the example of democracy in action in the school is worth more than a million textbooks about democracy.

The time may still be right for a revitalization of the decision-making process. Machinery has already been established in many schools—or is readily available—to channel student input into real and meaningful participation. What follows in these pages is a description of the many forms such participation has taken and may take, several models that can be employed, and an account of some of the pitfalls to be avoided.

The only requirements are a modicum of intelligence, an openness of spirit, and commitment. The commitment is crucial: One must be willing to face frustration, wasted energy, and out-and-out failure along the way. The reward may be no less than the rebirth of the educational process.

chapter 2

New Directions for Student Participation

For years the student council has been both the shining hope for advocates of experience-based learning and the prime target for those who are convinced that schools are hypocritical, manipulative, and authoritarian. It has been thought by some that the student council was never the "laboratory of democracy" it was designed to be. Planning social events, fund-raising, and sponsoring clean-up campaigns have predominated as primary functions. Consequently, much of the thrust of the recent student participation movement has been to look beyond the student council for channels of involvement to provide students direct access to administrative decision-making procedures.

However, a number of student councils have moved in new directions. Some councils have found that separation of social and "educational" functions has permitted them a new concentration on curricular or policy issues that had been previously ignored.

At one large suburban high school the educational activities committee of the council attracted most of the school's activist students and ultimately assumed, according to students and faculty, an authority beyond that of the council as a whole. The traditional social activities were left to the other major branch, the inter-class council. Meanwhile, the educational activities committee produced proposals for independent study, course auditing, an expanded work-study program, a program of after-school supplementary courses, and grading—most of which were adopted in some form.

Other councils have increased their impact by gaining the right to select their own advisers or limiting the adviser's veto power; by becoming the body that selects the student representatives on faculty or administration committees; by sponsoring open forums on school issues as a means of direct constituent input; or by simply asserting an "activist" role in relation to school policy questions. Under any student involvement structure students will find a need for their own "caucus," and what better vehicle for that than the student council?

The newer forms of student participation fall into several different categories:

- Students serve on standing, multi-purpose policy groups;
- Students take partial or full responsibility for particular school functions;
- Students affect school decision making from their own influence groups.

This participation takes place at all levels, from the individual classroom all the way to the federal government. The weight of student influence ranges from strictly advisory to full equality with adult colleagues. The groups may be long-standing bodies that simply add student members, they may be newly-formed specifically to include students, or they may be ad hoc groups assembled for a particular immediate purpose.

Standing Multi-purpose Policy Groups

These groups consider, with few limitations or within broad areas, the policies or issues proposed by their members, by the administration, or by their constituents.

Departmental. The department is typically among the most functional units in the secondary school's decision-making process. While the department is by definition composed of teachers, students at some schools have been invited to participate in meetings. Shaker High School in Latham, N.Y., has involved students in all departmental discussions, although they are not permitted to vote. West High School in Waterloo, Iowa, has a student-teacher committee for each departmental area. The committees meet separately and report their recommendations to the department.

Even in the classrooms, there have been some interesting approaches. For example, the Montgomery County, Md., Board of Education's "Policy Statement on Student Involvement in the Educational Process" requires that "in each course and at each grade level, students shall be encouraged to participate in establishing course goals, suggesting interest areas, planning classroom activities, and in appraising the course."

School. The most common school-wide structure that includes student as well as faculty participation is the *advisory committee to the principal.* The Educational Research Service reported in a 1971 survey that of 74 schools reporting student participation in school administration beyond the student council, 43 had a committee of students, usually joined by faculty and sometimes by parents, that advised the principal on a regular basis. New York City, for example, mandates for all high schools a "consultative council," which consists of five students, five parents, and five faculty members, and meets monthly with the principal.

A major experiment that has been tried in several schools with mixed results is the concept of *school government.* Also known as the "student-faculty-administration council," or "student-staff senate," such groups share the characteristic of including students as full members of bodies with ostensible authority to make school-wide policies of all kinds.

Although school governments appear to be an exciting new form of student participation, none has yet achieved the full decision-making authority that has sometimes been claimed for them. Faculties and administrations have retained most of the ultimate prerogatives given them by law and tradition.

System. Superintendents and other central office personnel have in some instances recognized the advantages of student input. District-wide curriculum committees, some with considerable power over academic decisions, have included students in districts such as Fort Collins, Colo.; East Orange, N.J.; and Artesia, Calif. Advisory committees to the superintendent frequently include students. In at least one large city school system, Washington, D.C., an office of student affairs, run partly by students, was established to

> provide regular representation in the Office of the Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Schools: (1) to aid in decision making; (2) coordinate student governmental activities throughout the city; (3) coordinate and strengthen co-curricular and extra-curricular activities; (4) act as a clearing house for student complaints; and (5) 'watch dog' the enforcement of a Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities.

Board of Education. It is probably at the board of education level that the greatest public attention has been focused on the student participation issue. This is ironic, given the general distance between board operations and the day-to-day functioning of the student. On the other hand, considering the largely symbolic nature of the student participation issue and the visibility of the board, the attention is only natural. The students who have been added to boards of education have generally been non-voting members and occasionally non-speaking members (or observers). The Student Delegate Assembly of the NASC/NASAA voted in 1975 that "every U.S. student council should work to obtain at least one non-voting student seat on its school board during the coming year."

One variation at the board of education level is the student school board. In several districts, a central body composed entirely of students meets regularly to consider many of the same issues considered by the school board. In Santa Barbara, Calif., the student board of education meets the day before the regular board, has regular press coverage, and has its actions placed on the agenda of the regular board. In Amherst, Mass., a student school committee (school board) is entitled to an immediate, "formal response" from administrators to each of its proposals.

State and Federal. Departments of education in several states have

made sincere, if not elaborate, efforts to involve students. The New York Commissioner of Education, for example, has a student advisory council with which he meets regularly. In addition, a task force on student affairs has concerned itself with matters relating to student rights and involvement. Students advise state boards of education in several states.

The U.S. Office of Education released a Youth Involvement Plan in 1971 that called for "clear and meaningful participation" by students in all phases of programs funded by the Office of Education. An Office of Student and Youth Affairs was established to assure such participation.

Specific School Functions

Some decision-making or advisory groups exist specifically for a single function. Some are standing bodies; others may be formed to serve an immediate need, then disbanded when their task has been completed.

Discipline. Minor discipline problems in the schools have traditionally been administered by the teacher, and by the principal in more significant cases. One exception has been in schools that employ student courts. A study of 14 high schools in the Baltimore-Washington area, one with a more-active-than-usual student court, found that "students in the school with a student court are significantly more likely than those in other schools to believe discipline is fair and to be satisfied with the school's rules and regulations, whether they have actually been disciplined or not."[1]

In schools where no student court exists, a student role in disciplinary proceedings is rare. The National Association of Secondary School Principals, in *The Reasonable Exercise of Authority,* recommended the establishment of hearing panels that include student representatives for serious disciplinary charges. The Association insists only that "suspension by the principal, pending the hearing, may be enforced where necessary."

Whether or not they are actually given enforcement roles, students should participate in the development of disciplinary policies. Students have been instrumental in developing rights and responsibilities codes in most major cities: The Seattle code was based almost entirely on documents submitted originally by students, while codes in New York and Philadelphia provide for student input regarding disciplinary policies through student government representatives.

Curriculum. Curriculum committees that deal with a wide range of issues—new courses, new programs, grading, scheduling, requirements, materials, and inter-disciplinary relations—are valuable channels for

1. James McPartland and Edward L. McDill, "Student Participation in High School Decisions" (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Final Report Project No. 9-0163, Grant No. OEG-3-9-330163-0035-010, Washington, D.C., 1970) Chap. IV, p. 13.

student input. In those districts that do have student members, their role is frequently an advisory one.

Students in some schools, however, have been given a degree of autonomy over mini-course programs. Mini-courses are short-term, usually student-requested learning experiences scheduled during the school day or during one-day to two-week suspensions of classes. In most cases student participation is emphasized, and students also frequently teach the courses. One high school in Maryland devoted a whole week to an "Experiment in Free-form Education" where students were the primary designers and schedulers of over 400 courses and alternative learning activities. With the help of the principal and two teachers, students contributed over 4,000 planning hours and saw the week to a successful conclusion.

Students have also participated in groups formed for a specific immediate need. Although professional resistance to student input in personnel decisions is high, students have sometimes been included in search or screening committees for the hiring of administrators and other staff. Students have been involved in the planning of new educational facilities, school security efforts, and institutional goals. They have also participated in committees to regulate student activities or behavior (e.g., dress codes, publications, and smoking areas).

Student Influence Groups

Student efforts to influence the decision-making process have not all been directed toward participation with adults on the normal governing bodies. Attempts have been made by students to develop independent political forces.

Student unions were formed in a number of states and large cities, although their life span has been notoriously short. The proposal for a Maryland student union listed four objectives:

- To provide "input" to legislators, school boards, and other policymakers;
- to be a student lobby group;
- to serve as "ombudsman" for student rights; and
- to provide information and other services to students.

The ultimate function of a student union, to serve as a bargaining agent, is not in accord with present or near-future realities.

Underground newspapers were common in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and still appear from time to time. Unlike the established high school newspaper, the underground press views itself as an agent of change. For example, the underground newspaper at one high school developed and ran an independent study program for students who wanted more intellectual nourishment from the school. They rejected the

option of individual independent study, which would rival the school's own program, in favor of a "study group plan" for the greater educational benefits that "students gettin' together" would provide.

Teacher evaluations have been extremely sensitive. In instances where students have developed (and occasionally published) teacher evaluations, however, the results have been significant. An Educational Research Service survey uncovered only two schools where the evaluations were reported to the administration—but it is clear that there is much potential for student input in this area.

Alternative Schools

In many alternative schools, shared decision making is a central philosophical principle. The students, who normally number between 40 and 150, participate fully with staff in the school's internal operations through such mechanisms as "town meetings," steering committees, task forces, and "contract" agreements. As in regular schools, the decision-making authority is circumscribed by board of education regulations, a school charter, state graduation requirements, and the influence of "absentee" administrators (commonly the high school principal). However, responsibility for a very substantial range of decisions resides in a real sense with the on-site students and staff.

A typical arrangement in one of the more than 1,000 public alternative schools estimated to exist in 1976 by the National Alternative Schools Program would find students intimately involved in decision making at several different levels. Individual programs in alternative schools are usually the primary responsibility of the student, working with a teacher-adviser or group leader, and often are bounded only by graduation requirements and the student's imagination and initiative. Independent study, community projects, and after-hours courses are common elements of such programs.

Student-teacher committees or task forces commonly make the day-to-day arrangements that govern school life. An executive or steering committee with student and teacher members is often the chief legislative or agenda-making body. All-school meetings, patterned after New England town meetings, where the assembled students and staff decide school policies on the one-person-one-vote principle are also common in the alternative schools.

The professional leader of the alternative school, called a director, coordinator, or head teacher, is given responsibility for the administrative detail of the school. In most public alternative high schools, the high school principal retains only titular authority, especially where the alternative school is physically separate from the high school.

Much attention is given to student participation as a cornerstone of the alternative school concept. Yet manageable size may be the real key. When personal contact and in-depth group discussions are possible on a

regular basis there is less reluctance on the part of the staff to share their authority. Alternative school teachers have been hired specifically for a small, less formal environment where it is understood that democratic principles will be extended to the students. And boards of education have often been less restrictive in regulating the small alternative schools which, after all, affect only 100 or so people.

Examples of the decisions made in town meetings or through representative committees in Teaneck, New Jersey's alternative school include putting community service on a voluntary basis; allowing students to fulfill their gym requirement over a yearly (rather than trimesterly) span; sending no class ranks to colleges; authorizing the purchase of books for one student-taught class and photographic supplies for another; and requiring teachers to offer written narratives to students in addition to grades. The community service issue was especially important, since the school charter required community service of all students. Students claimed that the mandatory aspect of the program was "unalternative" and, although they feared that a voluntary program might fail, the staff understood their obligation to permit and abide by a vote. At this writing, the staff and concerned students are working to translate the energy generated by the debate into an effective program of voluntary community service.

chapter 3

Models for Student Participation

The number of possible plans for student involvement is virtually unlimited. Participation can, for example, occur at different levels in the decision-making hierarchy, vary widely in its scope of concern, involve students from a variety of constituencies, give varied weight to the student voice, and differ in the degree of authority provided. The following question might provide the most effective means of presenting the major approaches to student participation: *Assuming school issues are introduced, considered, and resolved by a general decision-making process, what is the relationship of student participants to that process?*

Each of the basic approaches to student participation identified here represents a different relationship between students and the established decision-making process. The approach might be:

- *collaborative*—students participate as peers with their adult counterparts;
- *parallel*—student groups deal with much the same agenda items as adult decision makers and transmit their recommendations;
- *independent*—students are the prime decision makers in creating their own programs and operating procedures; or,
- *individual choice*—a large share of decision making is done by individual students.

These general approaches include a wide variety of intricate representational arrangements. In addition, many individual student involvement plans will combine two or more of these approaches; there is room among them for considerable overlap.

The Collaborative Model

In this model, students join with faculty and/or administrators and occasionally parents to consider the various academic and administrative issues that confront the groups. An underlying assumption of the

collaborative approach is that many issues cannot be considered the exclusive domain of any single segment of the school population. Collaboration likewise assumes that each concerned group can make a valuable contribution to the discussion of these issues; that differences in status and outlook among the group can be surmounted; and that successful implementation of policies and programs is facilitated when all concerned parties have had a share in their formulation.

In its purest form, this model provides for the participation of each segment of the community in all school decisions. In reality, of course, such an approach is neither feasible nor, to most participants, especially desirable. Student participation ranges from full membership on school-wide governing bodies to selective membership on individual committees established within a school for very specific functions. Collaboration, loosely defined, includes participation on an equal as well as an advisory basis. The principle of direct encounter and the requirement of ultimate cooperation remain consistent across all variations of this model, however.

The collaborative model is the one most commonly visualized—and implemented—when student participation in high school operations is suggested. It is relatively easy to add student members to pre-existing committees, achieving significant student involvement with a minimum of adjustment to the decision-making process.

On the other hand, the collaborative model can be the most difficult of all approaches to make truly effective. Students meeting with staff on a theoretically equal basis might be overwhelmed by the experience and authority of the adult school officials. Observers generally agree that special training for both students and adults is needed if such cross-status collaboration is to be effective.

Collaboration is used at some point in each of the alternative models described in the following paragraphs. The distinction is that in the collaborative model the open, cooperative, participatory approach—with all parties represented—is intrinsic to the decision-making process; in the others, various means of influencing decisions are employed.

The Parallel Model

Instead of meeting directly with adults to formulate and act upon school policies, students may deal with the issues independently. They constitute a supplementary channel in the established decision-making structure. Student recommendations or proposals are then submitted as formal input to the official decision makers.

Techniques can be devised to raise this from an advisory to a quasi-legislative status. For example, the student school committee (student school board) used in several Massachusetts high schools is patterned on the parallel model. Students representing the district's secondary schools meet separately from but follow a parallel path with the adult school

board, and publicly consider an unlimited range of school issues. Their impact is assured by the requirement of a formal response to their proposals by the administration, including specific reasons for rejection of any recommendations.

Some student groups provide for a discrete policy arm to deal with issues and programs that previously would have been the exclusive concern of faculty and administration. To the extent that such student groups concentrate on matters of common interest to students and adults, and do so independently, their approach can be considered "parallel." The logical derivative of this approach is a formal system of student input that includes student and faculty "houses" and procedures for joint resolution of differences.

Student courts are another variation of the parallel approach. Their disciplinary recommendations are usually made directly to the administration, which more often than not follows their advice.

The parallel model—unlike the collaborative model—provides students the opportunity to develop their own positions. Parallel student groups also have the advantage of being an accepted part of the established system, with the security of a guaranteed and respectful hearing. On the other hand, it is clear that the ultimate influence of a parallel student body can be little more than advisory.

Of all the models, the parallel presents the greatest danger of being taken less than seriously. Student recommendations, with neither binding influence nor assurance of full consideration, can be easily ignored. The "formal response" requirement referred to earlier is one means of assuring at least minimal attention to student proposals. Another method is to provide for student review of professional policy decisions. Even if the students' veto can be easily overridden, such a procedure is a valuable way to establish the mutual respect necessary for this model to work. Similar provisions to assure formal contact between the student and professional decision-making channels must be made if the parallel form is to have sufficient credibility with either group.

The Independent Model

In certain situations, students may be given real control over segments of the school program. These may include specific academic programs, a portion of the extra-curriculum, or the regulations that govern particular student conduct. The applicability of this model is dependent on a careful delineation of those areas in which students are allowed full decision-making responsibility. It assumes the legitimacy of considering certain activities as strictly within the student domain. Such an assumption would usually have as its correlate the proposition that there are also areas of strictly faculty concern, areas of administration concern, and areas of joint interest.

The least controversial way to implement this model is to do what has

often been advocated and occasionally attempted: provide the student council with full decision-making authority in specified areas. On the smallest scale, the council would be empowered to spend its money as it saw fit, conduct its own social affairs, and function as the sole regulator of student behavior during its own activities. On a somewhat larger scale, the council could be permitted to offer alternative academic programs and take primary responsibility for establishing standards of student conduct in the school. A student court could assume full responsibility for dealing with all minor disciplinary infractions.

The independent model has its greatest impact if the area of student authority is curricular. Students have run mini-course programs in a number of schools. The Experiment in Free-form education described on page 7 is an example. Students in another school directed a work-study program, including released time from the school day. Independent study programs have been conducted under student auspices. Such programs can be "legitimized" if academic credit is granted.

The independent model, where it is operative, will always co-exist with other decision-making arrangements. This presupposes constant effort to keep the decision-making spheres (student, faculty, and joint) separated. Of the models so far discussed, this is the only model that assures students of experience--positive and/or negative—in making binding decisions, implementing them, and accepting full responsibility for their consequences. In some situations, however, legal constraints will prohibit fully independent student decision making.

The Individual Choice Model

Another perspective on school decision making maintains that group decisions cannot have impact equal to individual choice. Individual options in course and teacher selection, evaluation procedures, scheduling, etc., provide the basis for a fourth model of student participation. The ultimate in this approach would be the "contract" plan, in which an individual student and his adviser plan a full academic program restricted only by the resources available.

The degree of individual choice available to students in public high schools is generally quite limited. There is, however, a significant variation from one school to another in the extent to which academic alternatives are provided. Many schools still prescribe virtually all the components of a student's program, leaving one or two electives. Others have compiled extensive catalogs of optional courses in all academic areas. Some have scheduled large portions of each student's day for independent study; some allow students to receive credit for special activities pursued outside the school during the school day; and some schools are experimenting with individualized schedules that permit an infinite number of unique student programs. Student choice of teachers and of evaluation procedures are also sometimes offered, albeit less frequently.

In an effort to create a climate conducive to learning, a Portland, Oreg., high school emphasized the individual choice model:

> Our goal was active student participation in educational decision making, both in guiding their individual progress and in shaping the school curriculum; the preconditions we assumed necessary for this participation were freedom of movement and course choice for students and close student-teacher relationships.[1]

A Burlington, Vt., high school has allowed potential dropouts to receive credit for full-time out-of-school projects under a contract plan called ASPIRE. New York City has offered a city-wide plan whereby credit is granted for student-devised courses and part-time outside employment. The potential impact of these and other developing programs on a student's educational experience is great.

The individual choice model cannot, of course, exist in isolation from the broader decision-making process in a school. In fact, it is the school-wide decisions that create the framework—providing the choices and establishing the requirements—within which individual choices can be made. But in a school that seriously applies the individual choice model, the most important decisions tend to shift in the direction of the individual.

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1. Patricia A. Wertheimer, "School Climate and Student Learning," *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1971, p. 527.

chapter 4

The Decision-Making Environment

The extent to which the participation models described in the preceding chapter actually function as intended is dependent on a number of environmental factors that will vary greatly from situation to situation. This chapter will look at some of the major environmental factors. These discussions are by no means intended to be definitive, since each factor would be at least a separate study in itself.

Legal and Political Considerations

Laws governing the American education system are complex. It is, therefore, inevitable that students seeking greater participation will be confronted with conflicting legal pressures. On the one hand, the trend for many years has been to place more and more control in the hands of the professionals. The doctrine of *in loco parentis* dominated much of the judicial and legislative thinking about the exercise of authority in the schools. Although the tradition of decisions being made by adults for students is a strong one, the recognized scope of student rights is now regularly being expanded by the courts, providing some rationale for those who would ultimately extend to students the right to full voting participation in school decision making.

The courts have shown a greater willingness to accept school regulations concerning discipline, dress, etc., as "reasonable" if student participation in the formation of these rules can be demonstrated. Administrators have been advised by the NASSP, in *The Reasonable Exercise of Authority,* that they can "minimize, or perhaps avert, confrontations with students and . . . stay out of court by ensuring student participation . . . in the development of rules of conduct and of related disciplinary procedures."

Some partisan observers see the trend toward judicial affirmation of constitutional rights for students as an indication that it is unwise, if not specifically unconstitutional, for schools to continue to deny students a voice in the decisions that govern their daily lives. The Supreme

Court has ruled: "Neither the Fourteenth Amendment nor the Bill of Rights is for adults alone."[1]

> First Amendment rights, applied in the light of special characteristics of the school environment, are available to teachers and students. It can hardly be argued that either teachers or students shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.[2]

To date, no direct effort has been made to have these rights extended to full enfranchisement within the school. However, as various rights—to dress, to due process, to free publications, etc.—are increasingly affirmed by the courts, the prospect that the judiciary would someday mandate student participation in decision making seems less far-fetched.

The NASSP has recognized this prospect in a *Legal Memorandum:*

> Student rights to freedom of speech and of the press will need to be respected, and it may even be necessary to recognize the right of students to communicate with management in the development of policies that govern their everyday lives in school.[3]

It is clear that the commitment and good faith of adults is a prerequisite for the success of plans for student involvement. There will always be a higher authority (adult) whose forbearance is necessary before students can exercise decision-making responsibilities.

Changing Educational Patterns

The search for ways to bring students into the decision-making process is complicated by the changing nature of the school setting itself. To assume that existing curricula, administrative structures, or even school buildings will remain constant while the added participation of students revises only the decision-making channels is to misunderstand the contemporary educational scene, in which student participation is only one of many innovative pressures at work. In fact, serious change now or soon to be underway in all of these areas renders any discussion of student participation incomplete to the extent that it does not recognize the prospect of these concurrent changes.

A common denominator among many of the newer trends in high schools is the attempt to "open" the campus. The "school without walls" approaches the ultimate in the open campus concept. Many schools have developed programs that release students for part of the day to work, do internships, or study independently. The granting of credit for student-devised courses—on campus or off—has been tried experimentally in a number of schools, and proposed for all of New York

1. *In re Gault*, 387 U.S. 1, 13 (1967).

2. Tinker v. Des Moines, 393 U.S. 503 (1969).

3. *Legal Memorandum* (Reston, Va.: National Association of Secondary School Principals, April 1974) pp. 7-8.

City's high schools.[4] The Massachusetts Board of Education has adopted a statewide "open campus" plan wherein an expanded school day and decreased time requirements for formal instruction combine to increase greatly the flexibility of program design.[5]

Even where the campus remains self-contained, the current emphasis is frequently on "opening" the student's daily program. Flexible scheduling, including as much as 10 to 40 percent unscheduled time, provides great potential mobility in many schools. Individualized learning (implying pre-packaged programs and self-pacing) has not been much used in high schools; but where it has, students are less tied to routine daily schedules and unvarying physical locations.

What precise effect these developments will have on the future character of student participation is unclear. One argument purports that of the approaches discussed in the preceding chapter, the "individual choice" model appears the one most likely to be adopted on a major scale by schools moving in these new directions; but this model involves the least amount of collaboration and is farthest from what is traditionally perceived as student decision-making activity. It would appear also that the "independent" approach, where students take responsibility among themselves for portions of the school program, will become increasingly operative. The implication is that the decision-making burden shifts, under the types of schools described above, toward the individual. If there are more choices to be made by individuals, there is less need for decision making to be made on a school-wide basis. Thus, the proper focus for students concerned with the decisions that most affect their lives is to see to it that as many decisions as possible are made at the most decentralized level.

Another argument asserts that it is illusory to believe that "individual choices" can be made in a school without many more decisions having been made at a higher level to define the choices available. It becomes, in fact, even more important for students to share in establishing the framework—the criteria, the options, and the regulations—in a school where individualization and change are the signal characteristics. Furthermore, if closer relationships between students and staff are an express objective of much high school reform, the elevation of students more nearly to peer status within the school structure is also important.

Most high schools concerned with such innovation place a high premium on meaningful student participation. In the proposals and other documents of the "alternative" or "mini" schools, the rhetoric is heavily oriented toward "total involvement," "equality," and "self-direction."

As the traditional lock-step patterns of schooling are dissolved, it

4. *New York Times*, 24 February, 1972, p. 78.

5. *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 1971, p. 388.

appears that student participation—in some form—will become increasingly prominent and real. Whether this participation will focus mainly on designing student's individual programs, on establishing procedures and regulations on a school-wide basis, on a combination of both of these, or on a still undetermined ingredient of the educational process, is yet to become clear.

chapter 5

Recommendations

It is fashionable to say of student participation that "different forms are suited to different institutions." On the basis of the limited evidence available, however, a school would have great difficulty choosing from among the major alternative approaches the one(s) most "suitable" for its particular situation. *Each* of the general approaches identified in this study contributes in a different way toward achievement of the goals of student participation.

It is, therefore, recommended that schools committed to increasing student participation make provisions for the simultaneous use of the full variety of possible approaches to such involvement. In other words, any scheme should include at least these major components: (1) opportunities for students to work collaboratively, as peers, with teachers and administrators in decision-making groups; (2) opportunities for students to influence decision making from groups solely of their own membership, reflecting their own deliberations and using their own resources; and (3) opportunities for considerable student initiative in designing individual academic programs. Each of these has a discrete developmental function, and none is more expendable than others.

Although efforts to move in the directions indicated above should proceed without delay, *it is recommended that concurrent attention of the most urgent nature be given to the preparation of the members of the school community—students and professionals alike—for these new forms of interaction.* The preparation of students for their expanded decision-making responsibilities should include a great deal of actual clinical experience—"education through involvement"—as well as more traditional classroom teaching. Such activity should be considered a vital educational endeavor and rewarded accordingly with substantial academic credit. Significant blocks of time should be provided all students to discuss and act on school issues. "Leadership classes" are fine as far as they go. Such classes should be provided for *all* students, however, not merely the elite. Students should be provided skills (partly by adults,

partly by fellow students, partly by themselves) not only in the arts of collaboration and civic cooperation, but also in "self-advocacy." Such training, to be effective, must begin in the earliest grades; the habit of passive subjection to unilateral decision making is often firmly entrenched by the time a student reaches high school.

Similarly, teachers and administrators need retraining for the new set of values and interrelationships implied in increased student participation.

In any plan involving students, *it is recommended that special provision be made for these potential hazards to effective implementation:*

- *Accountability* of student representatives to their constituents;
- *Communication* between participating students and their less-involved peers;
- *Dissemination* of information on the issues to all segments of the school community;
- *Confidentiality* of information, if it is a basis for excluding students from certain deliberations;
- *Precise specification of authority* in the system as a whole.

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